



RNC PROTESTERS WILL HAVE NO TROUBLE BEING HEARD

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The activists, possibly professionals, who intend to organize a major protest march and various assemblies of dissatisfactions at the Republican National Convention continue to be aggrieved by the permit process. The group is called the Coalition to March on the RNC and Stop the War. The city has granted that group a conditional permit, but the time and route of a planned principal march Sept. 1 has not been spelled out by the city.

It does not seem plausible the city is dragging its feet. That is the accusation of Meredith Aby, an organizer of the march. Our elected worthies have insisted they intend to be entirely charitable to the protesters, that the city must be welcoming for protesters and that they, the elected officials, even find themselves having to sheepishly acknowledge the irony of a Republican National Convention getting assigned to their precinct.

The only story that springs to mind about the convention that has not had anything to do with the concerns of protesters was a piece a few weeks back when we learned the St. Paul Hotel has laid in some very expensive Scotch, it being a cliché, of course, that Republicans will pay hundreds of dollars for a taste.

Out in Denver, I guess, Democrats will not drink, although Clinton has been photographed lately drinking beer.

It's the feds who are holding things up, not St. Paul. The St. Paul Police Department is awaiting instructions from federal officials who have not determined a convention security perimeter around the Xcel Energy Center. I suppose if you are a protester, that doesn't fly, but it certainly seems reasonable. Or, more accurately, it doesn't seem reasonable that the protesters, who promise to deliver tens of thousands of anti-war protesters to St. Paul over Labor Day weekend, should be allowed to determine what constitutes a secure perimeter and what does not.

For now, the protesters have been issued a conditional agreement that allows them to assemble on the grounds of the Capitol. Final arrangements might not be available until May 31. At that time, as I understand it, the group will be told it has such and such a street at such and such a time. St. Paul isn't that big. The protesters will have no trouble being heard or receiving media attention.

As for parks, Aby's group insists the prime ones have been reserved for Republicans -- Rice Park and that strip of river bluff on Kellogg near the Wabasha Street Bridge -- because the city "told Republican event planners that they would have a beautiful, isolated experience where they don't have to talk to anyone who agrees with the anti-war agenda."

Well, again, that is just not plausible. I find myself having to adopt a curious Chamber of Commerce-type attitude here. We don't have anybody who could have possibly told the Republicans any such thing. The Republicans will be made to feel more unwelcome in St. Paul than the protesters.

That's just the way we are. No Republicans represent either St. Paul or Minneapolis in the Legislature. No Republican represents either city as mayor. The governor, who is a Republican, could not count on six of his own kind to back him up on a veto of the recent tax increases.

When our lodge promises the protesters a good experience, they are not kidding. Even with the feds weighing in, I'll bet that the protesters not only get a good route for their Sept. 1 march but also that they are granted a good staging area for chanting and sign-waving, probably across the street from the Xcel Energy Center in the infamous Cleveland Circle, which we didn't even know we had until we were disabused of a ballpark going in there so it could be used as a transit hub.

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